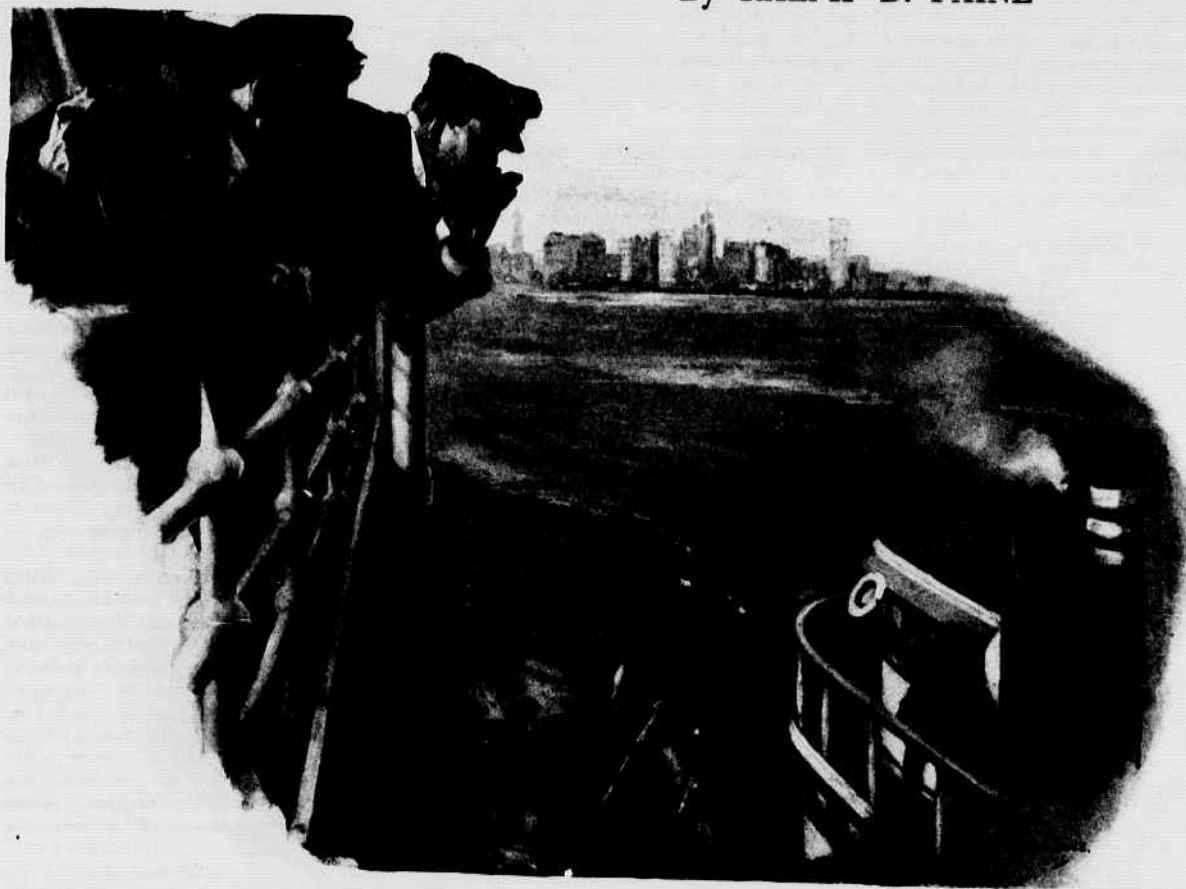


A Better Man than His Father

By RALPH D. PAINE



THE Chilton Grange, a British tramp, lay at anchor in the harbor of New York. She was an uncouth, wall-sided steamer of three thousand tons, with bridge and deck-houses rising like an island amidships, indistinguishable from a hundred others of her kind that hardily roam the seas in search of trade.

Captain Nelson Sackett sat at the desk in his small cabin and tried to write a letter to his wife. The task was not so pleasant as usual. His solid shoulders were hunched forward, the ruddy, intrepid countenance was clouded, and he wiped a perspiring brow with his shirt-sleeve after making several false starts with a spluttering pen.

At length he managed to say what it sorely troubled him to disclose, and then, with a readier mind, he wrote these closing words:

You and I will laugh over this when I steam into the Mersey and you are waiting for me on the landing stage with the youngster holding fast to your hand. Bless him! that was a fine school report for an eight-year-old that he sent me at Rio. I shall have some time to play with him while the ship is in Liverpool. I am loving you, Judith, the same as always, and I will ever be
Your fond and faithful husband.

IN haste to post the letter in the next outbound mail, he sent a boat ashore with it, and went below to consult the chief engineer.

When he returned to the deck a small tug was making for the Chilton Grange at top speed, frantically blowing its whistle to attract notice.

As it foamed alongside Captain Sackett saw standing in front of the wheelhouse a tall, smartly tailored young man with a pink and white complexion, unmistakably English, his smile frank and boyish.

Flourishing his straw hat, the young man called up:

"Not such an awful lot of time to spare—what? They told me at the wharf that you had cleared for Liverpool. I should like to come aboard, if you please."

He held a kit-bag, and the two leather trunks in the bow were obviously his property. The puzzled shipmaster bluntly replied:

"You have chased the wrong vessel. Better have another try at it."

Undismayed, the debonair young man returned:

"Not a bit of it. This is precisely all right. The Chilton Grange is what I want. Hoist this luggage aboard, will you?"

"Drunk or daffy," said Captain Nelson to his elderly first mate. "A person who mistakes us for a passenger boat has violent delusions."

The voice of the young man floated up to them in amiable expostulation:

"I fancied you might recognize me. Evidently not. Stupid of me! I am Mr. Hayden Norcross, you know. My father happens to own the Chilton Grange."

Captain Sackett's mouth hung open while he stared down at the tug. Rhoades, the melancholy first mate, clung to the rail and forgot his errand. The seamen within earshot scuffled to the side to view the sensational stranger.

"You are the son of Sir James Babb Norcross?" incredulously cried the skipper.

"The only one there is, my dear man. I can't very well give you my card until you let me aboard. I intend to sail with you."

"You intend to sail with me? I don't know about that. Of course if you put it to me as an order; but—but—" The Captain spoke slowly, his rather stolid features working with some hidden emotion.

CRISPLY, with a touch of impatience, the heir of the great shipping house of Norcross exclaimed as he made for the side ladder:

"Oh, I say, drop that nonsense! You and I will have to get on better than this. Please do as I tell you."

With a shrug Captain Sackett ordered the trunks taken aboard, and noted that they bore the stenciled name of Hayden Norcross. Again engagingly affable, the young man remarked as he scrambled to the deck:

"It rather stumps you, I presume. I call it jolly good luck. It's the first time I ever booked myself in one of the governor's ships."

Uncomfortable, reluctant, the Captain

strove to be courteous, and said as they walked forward:

"I didn't mean to be short with you, sir; but I'm not at all anxious to carry you to England. It is not the sort of travel you are accustomed to, and—"

"Oh, I shall have to learn the shipping business when I get home," laughed the other, "and this is a useful experience. I don't mind roughing it."

Captain Sackett's voice was unsteady as he asked:

"How did the notion happen to seize you, Mr. Norcross?"

"I have been globe-trotting (went out by way of Suez), having a look at the silly old world before putting my nose to the grindstone. Like a cheerful ass I neglected to reserve a room in a liner, and when I reached New York a few days ago every boat was jammed full,—the summer rush of Americans. I was tired of loafing about, and by chance I spied a shipping item about the Chilton Grange—one of the Norcross freighters, by Jove!—bound to Liverpool in ballast. 'Here goes!' said I—and here I am."

HAYDEN NORCROSS gazed about him as though well pleased with his choice of transportation. The decks were scrubbed white, the brasswork gleamed like gold, and the houses had been freshly painted. Her master did his best by the steamer; although Sir James Babb Norcross grumbled at the cost and pared the bills to the bone.

"I call this ripping!" declared the young man. "Quite as if I were in my own yacht,—no beastly crowd, and a leisurely voyage. You mustn't look so put out about it, Captain Sackett. I promise not to make a nuisance of myself."

"Very well, sir. You have the right to do as you like. You are inviting yourself, please remember that. I shall try my best to give you a comfortable passage."

"It is my own surprise party," was the cheerful rejoinder. "How long before we head for the open sea?"

"Two or three hours. What about sending word to your father that you are in the Chilton Grange, Mr. Norcross?"

"**Y**OU are the son of Sir James Babb Norcross?" incredulously cried the skipper.

"The only one there is, my dear man. I can't very well give you my card until you let me aboard. I intend to sail with you."

"I shall write him at once," was the easy reply. "The letter will reach Liverpool ahead of us. What's the use of cabling?"

"I am afraid to-day's mail has closed; but there will be another sailing this week. Aye, the letter will be in England before we are. And you will be sure to mention that you asked yourself aboard and I objected?"

"Still harping on the same string!" exclaimed Hayden Norcross. "I solemnly swear to absolve you from all part and share in my voyage."

The Captain showed an odd unwillingness; but this was doubtless a natural feeling of responsibility in the case of so important a personage as the son of Sir James Babb Norcross. No rudeness was intended.

IN lovely June weather the Chilton Grange left port. Captain Nelson Sackett had handled men for many years, and he appraised them shrewdly. This youngster was generous, clean, unspoiled by golden fortune. It was impossible to dislike him.

At table in the cabin Rhoades and the chief engineer, quiet, shy men, were not at their ease in the company of the owner's son; but he could not be held blameworthy. His was an effulgent name; and the barrier of caste oppressed their honest British souls. It was singular that his presence should not have aroused their resentment; for they dumbly felt that the Norcross millions had been sweated out of the ocean carrying trade and that the titled owner in Liverpool could afford to deal more justly with his men and ships.

The passenger's appetite was good, his digestion perfect; but the deuce of it was that he could not seem to get enough to eat. A chap felt awkward about mentioning the fact; but if he expected to control a few dozen steamers himself some day, he really ought to find out a few things. In such a well kept ship as this short rations, and rotten bad at that, seemed confoundingly queer.

"I say, what's the program for feeding these boats?" he sang out to the skipper, who was in the chart-room. "What I mean is, how are they provisioned?"

Captain Sackett grinned. He had an unobtrusive sense of humor. Until now he had tactfully avoided ruffling the young man.

"Most of the stuff is put aboard at Liverpool," he told him, "excepting a little fresh grub picked up from port to port. The ship has an expense allowance. If a master exceeds it, he goes